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Letter from Rev. Matthew Dinsdale to Brother 1850 April 7

Matthew Dinsdale

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Edward
~~LETTER from MATTHEW DINSDALE to his brother JOHN DINSDALE~~

Upper California, April 7, 1850

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My Dear Brother:

I am now at a place called Bird's Store, high up in the mountains, where we arrived day before yesterday, where we have pitched our tent, and shall look around for a few days. It is between the middle and north branch of the American River and I believe as high up as any settlement has been formed in the mountains and almost as far up as any digging has been attempted. It is yet too early for this part to do much at mining as there is still much snow on the ground and consequently too much water and since our arrival much rain has fallen and now, while I write it is battering the tent in earnest but it is a good one and therefore we feel tolerable safe. Three of us (Wasley, James and I) with three animals (one pony and two mules) came up and brought some provision and our bedding. We were four days in coming sixty miles and had hard and dry roads almost all the way, not being in the region of snow except the last half day, but the hills, or rather mountains we had to ascend and descend! If they were not something to get over, I am seriously mistaken. I at one time thought the elevations I had been on and seen could not be beat. But now I give up to these in California. To say they are high, is a trifle. They are almost perpendicular. I am alone in the tent, the others having gone four miles to give our animals grass, none of any moment being in this part. But though there is no grass, there is abundance of splendid timber, principally pine of various kinds, cedar and oak. A noble pine is just in front of our tent, which looks south.

HEAR
I have been about eleven weeks in this country, two of which I spent in San Francisco, part of the time I have been travelling about and the rest I have spent in the mines. It has been my privilege several Sabaths to preach Christ, I think with a desire to promote the interests of His Kingdom. I have also had the pleasure of meeting with the friends of Jesus in this country and I have had comfortable intercourse with them. There is much wickedness in the land but there are a few whose hearts are right with God. Do not fail to pray for your absent brother that I may still be kept in the power of Israel's God and live to glorify Him. Hitherto I have had grace according to my day.

The digging season has not yet commenced and probably will not for a month, but by coming early, I have the advantage of being on the spot ready to go to work and shall have got somewhat accustomed to the climate. On leaving San Francisco, we made our way to Weberville as Jas. Wasley was living there. We left on the evening of Tuesday, the fifth of Feby. and arrived Saturday, the 9th.. We came up the Sacramento River to Sacramento City, by steamer Senator. The rest of the way, about fifty miles, we walked. Weberville is situated on the lower slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and is about twenty miles from the Sacramento Valley. It is considered a good place to winter at, the emigrant road from the mountains passing near.

The diggings have been good but with the present mode of operating, will not pay as men consider pay in this country. All the beds of the streams and creeks that would yield anything of moment, have been turned over. Most of the miners from there have come up here. But there is no doubt much gold there which will be gathered some day. The day before we left, a lump weighing $2\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. was found about three miles below the village. It was a solid mass of gold and the best as a specimen piece I have seen. It was dug out of a small branch running into Weber Creek. When the weather would permit, we went to prospect and I believe always found some gold, though frequently but little. The proper places now to dig are the beds and banks of the streams, the object is to find the parts where the gold is lodged by washing. In order to do this, you have generally to go below the surface, but this fact of finding it more or less in quantity, almost every time a person tries to find it, satisfies me it is very abundant. And this I know, much has been taken out of the ground, much is left. It is my opinion that much more gold has been dug than is generally supposed in the States. But not all are successful. During the winter or rainy season, no one expects to do much and some lay by altogether. While we were at Weberville three of us made \$90. each, the most of it in old diggings. So that the winter has not been entirely thrown away.

I must now say a little about California as a country as you probably hear the most contradictory reports, at least I do, even on the spot. The Sacramento valley is the most noted in connection with that of the San Joakin (pronounced San Wakeen) So far as I have seen, I will try to tell you. I came up the Sacramento River after a flood. The river was then full. The country - or valley - on either side, was flat and low and to a great extent in many parts covered with water. Tho in part the ground was bare, trees grow thick on the margin of the river and are scattered so as to give a pleasant appearance on the plain but are rather scarce than otherwise and chiefly oak. Being the winter season the prospect was of necessity more cheerless as the trees were leafless and the ground *(bare)*. At Sacramento City I left the river and entered on the valley in an easterly direction toward the mountains. Almost at the city, I saw quite across this part of the *(valley)* probably 25 miles and then over the slope, mountains clear to the Sierra Nevada *(covered)* with perpetual snow and now exhibiting themselves in their last white robe. *(The)* distance by the road must be 150 miles from the city to the top of the Sierra Nevadas. We were $2\frac{1}{2}$ days in walking from the river to Jas. Wasley's and I observed quite a difference of character as we progressed. The first day we travelled miles across as pleasant and beautiful a plain as human eye ever rested on. To the left at a short distance was the American River, a deep and rapid stream about as wide as the Ure at Middleham on the right and also left and before stretched the valley, green with new grass in every part and large and venerable oaks just in sufficient numbers to make the view agreeable. No brush or underwood of any moment. The next 18 miles the ground was more uneven and is what might be termed rolling and as we proceeded I noticed it was most so and in several places stones and rocks made their appearance on the surface of the ground and small runs of water began to be numerous. The white oak of the previous day was smaller and mixed with live oak, which is an evergreen and pleasant on that account.

The last 22 miles, the country was hilly in all directions and is a portion of that mentioned by Fremont as situated between the valley and the mountains. Pine is first met with and I noticed where the pine timber is, there is but little grass except there be rather broad and well-watered valleys and these are met with oftener than might be expected. Here also the Chapparell, a sort of large and very agreeable looking shrub makes its appearance.

I noticed some very good locations for farms, that is, good looking such at least as would answer if there were no better and a man could have them as large as he would like. But the conclusion I have come to is this, that if there is not a better farming country in California, than the part I have seen I would rather have a farm in Wisconsin, long and severe as its winters are. The dry and scorching summers are the great drawback. On the bay further south than I have been, is very highly spoken of and I think is both a pleasant and good part. Since I came up, I went down to Sacramento only last week, or rather week before last. The whole country looks better than when I first saw it, especially the great valley, the grass is higher and more flowers in bloom and the trees have commenced to bud and put forth their leaves. Both times numerous herds of horses and cattle were grazing which gave the country an old and settled appearance. From two elevations, there is a very extensive view of a great portion of the valley across the river, which is seen winding in its course till the eye is bound by the coast range of mountains. One prospect reminded me of that at the Blue Mounds, Wisconsin looking west and I was almost ready to fancy myself there.

As to climate if I live to remain in the country a year, I shall know more about it but I can tell you the little I do know. The climate for the season is very agreeable and one of the pleasantest I have ever been in, and so far as I have seen or heard, is the best feature of California. While I have been here, there has however been one drawback and that is the rainy weather which is gloomy in the extreme. But from the first of February till this time, I think not over one eighth of the time has been rainy, the rest clear and agreeable, frequently warm and even hot. The nights have been invariably cool and sometimes chilly. At Weberville, which is in the mountains, snow fell two or three times but did not remain and some nights we had pretty sharp frost. On my way up from the city, the weather was as pleasant and vegetation as advanced as in May in Wisconsin and the other week things were still further advanced. At San Francisco in Jan. gardens were made and the stuff growing and in Feb. on the plain, farmers were ploughing and putting in their crops. I noticed that two horses and a small plow were used to turn over the sod for the first time. The soil is of a sandy nature. Today the thermometer has ranged from a little below to a little above fifty.

April 8th. Now that I think of it, I want you to get a specimen of copper ore I used to keep in the clock at Linden. I believe I forgot to pack it up with my baggage and I would not like to lose it. This morning we had heavy rain, hail and snow and was a most disagreeable one but this afternoon it is fair and the sun shines. I have no intention of remaining in this country now that I have seen it. I like Wisconsin better and hope to return before a great while. Apr. 12th Wednesday, Thursday and part of today we have been on an exploration excursion. We took a small tent and pitched it when night overtook us, turned our animals loose for a short time to pick up grass if they could find it, made a fire, cooked supper, talked over the day's adventures and went to bed. We went as far toward the mountains still beyond here ----

(End of longhand sheet - remainder of letter apparently lost)